DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 787 CG 021 273

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TITLE Factors Influencing Career Aspirations of Senior and Freshmen College Students.
PUB DATE 22 Apr 88
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (59th, Buffalo, NY, April 21-24, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; *Career Choice; *College Freshmen; *College Seniors; Higher Education; Majors (Students); *Occupational Aspiration; Parent Aspiration; Parent Influence; Self Concept; Sex Differences

ABSTRACT

Although numerous studies have investigated internal and external factors that influence career aspirations of college students, little has been done to investigate how these factors differentially affect specific grade levels of college students. This study examined several internal and external variables (grade level, gender, college major, self-concept, parental occupation, parental education level, parent career aspiration for child) that might influence the career aspirations of college freshmen and college seniors. College seniors (N=121) and freshmen (N=110) from six academic divisions completed questionnaires assessing demographic information on students and their parents, career aspirations of students and parents, and motivation for a particular career. Subjects also completed the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. The results showed that subject gender and academic degree level significantly contributed to prediction of career aspirations. Father's job type significantly contributed to freshmen's but not seniors' career aspirations and to males' but not females' career aspirations. College males continued to aspire to traditionally high prestige/male classified careers while females more typically aspired to moderate prestige/female classified careers. Females tended to lower their career aspirations as they continued through the formal educational process. (NB)

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# FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF SENIOR AND FRESHMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, 59th, Buffalo, NY, April 21-24, 1988.



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1. Title: Factors Influencing Career Aspirations of Senior and Freshmen College Students

2. Topical Session Preference(s):
Social Development
Sex Differences
Social Influence

3. Major Purpose:

Although number of studies have investigated both internal (e.g. self-esteem, self-concept, and attitudes) and external (e.g. socioeconomic status of the family, parental education and values) factors that influence the career aspirations of college students (Zuckerman, 1985; Jones & Lamke, 1985; Becker, 1984; Habor, 1980; Twyman, 1980), in recent years little has been done to investigate how these factors differentially affect specific grade levels of college students. This present study was designed to investigate and specifically compare a number of internal and external variables that might influence the career aspirations of college freshman with college seniors. The factors under investigation included grade level, sex of the student, college major, self-concept, as well as parental occupation, educational level, and career aspirations for their sons and daughters.

4. Subjects:

Two hundred and thirty one students were selected from the senior and freshman class at a small liberal arts college in southeast New York to participate in this study. These included 121 seniors and 110 freshman comprised of 103 males and 128 females. Students were selected from each of the six academic divisions existing at the college so as to insure there would be an appropriate range of college majors represented in our sample.

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5. Procedure:

Each subject was given a questionnaire to complete either immediately before class or at their own convenience. The questionnaire was designed to obtain from the student the relevant demographic data on both themselves and their parents that the study was investigating. In addition information was obtained concerning the specific career aspirations of the students as well as what they perceived to be their parents aspirations for them. It also obtained the reason, which was later classified in terms of intrinsic or extrinsic factors, why the student wished to realize a particular career. Subjects were also asked to complete the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (adult form) as part of the study, to obtain a measure of self-concept, a variable of particular interest in this study.

6. Results of Findings:

When conducting a regression analyses for all subjects, sex of subject and academic degree level significantly contributed to prediction of the subjects career aspirations. Males most typically aspire to male/high prestige level careers and females most typically aspire to neutral/ moderate prestige level careers. Those students who intend to seek higher level degrees (M.A. or Ph.D.'s versus B.A. or B.S.'s) more often aspire to male/high prestige level careers. Father's job type significantly contributed to freshmen's but not senior's career aspirations and to male's but not female's career aspirations.

Differential patterns of sex type and prestige level of career aspirations were noted when comparing the different college major types. Parent's occupation and educational backgrounds also varied by major. The parents of Social and Behavioral Science majors were reported to significantly more often disagree with child's career aspiration when compared to all other college majors. Female college students were found to more frequently change majors. Female seniors had significantly higher self-concept scores than did males, but there was no difference between male's and female's self-concept scores in the freshman year. Those females with higher self-concept score had higher career aspirations. Other significant patterns of results were found and discussion of their implications will be made.

7. Implications and Conclusions:

Women are currently entering traditionally male classified occupations in a greater number than at any other time, but as shown in the present study college males continue to aspire almost exclusively to traditionally high prestige/male classified careers while females most typically aspire to moderate prestige/female classified careers. This result seems to dispute the societal-wide claim that we have completely "opened the door" for females to feel free to enter high level careers. Interestingly, females actually lower their career aspirations as they continue through the formal educational process. There seems to be

a need to more directly encourage females to consider an even greater range of careers as they complete their formal education. On a more positive note, college students do seem to realistically acknowledge the need for the pursuit of advanced degrees in order to aspire to higher level careers. This was particularly noted in the Social and Behavioral Science field. The influence of the family on the selection of careers was shown by the fact that parent's careers and parent's education level significantly contributed to the prediction of college students career aspirations.

Career counselors may be well advised to take note that there seems to be different contributors to career aspirations for the various majors and that unlike other major fields, Social and Behavioral Science majors lack the parental support for their career selection. Perhaps this suggests that different types of career counseling and support needs to be considered for the different college majors.

Further inquiry needs to be made into why females enter college with a slightly lower self-concept than males and why females appear to make significant gains toward a more positive self concept between the freshman and senior years of college. Surprisingly, even though self-concept raises for females during their college years, status level of their career aspiration in general declines

although overall, females and males with high self-concepts do tend to aspire to higher status careers. Further inquiry into the decline of career aspirations for females and the relationship to self concept seems warranted. In addition, plans for a longitudinal follow-up to this study will be discussed.

Student Questionnaire:

Age: _____

Sex: _____Male _____Female

Major: _____. Has it changed since you entered college? Yes ; No (Circle one)

What is the highest degree you hope to obtain (here at Marist or elsewhere?

_____

Are you living with your parents? Yes ; No (Circle one)

Mother's occupation _____

Highest level of education completed _____.

Father's occupation_____

Highest level of education completed_____

What occupation/career do you hope to obtain immediately after you complete your formal education?

_____

Is this occupation one that your parents would also like to see you working at? Yes ; No (Circle one)

If no, what would they like your occupation to be and why?

_____

Why do you plan to pursue your chosen career goal?

_____

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